

Foreign Service Spouse Series

REGINA BLAKE

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi and Arwin Smallwood

Interview date: July 2, 1990

Q (Fenzi): This is Jewell Fenzi on Monday, July 2, 1990. I am interviewing Regina Blake, Mrs. Monroe Williams Blake, who was Director of spouse training at the Foreign Service Institute from 1955 until 1960. Sitting in with us this morning is Arwin Smallwood, a graduate student from Ohio State University who is a summer intern at the Overseas Briefing Center. He is working on a history of spouse training, which will be a chapter in his Ph.D. dissertation. We will also be looking at Mrs. Blake's 1950s files from the Institute for the first time in twenty-eight years. The documents were boxed and delivered to her apartment in the Westchester when she left FSI.

I'd like to say first that I would like to take the journalistic approach - who, why, what, when and where. And I would ask first, when did you organize spouse training at the Foreign Service Institute?

BLAKE: My husband died in February 1955. In those days the American Association of Foreign Service Wives [Women] didn't exist. There was an informal Foreign Service Wives Group, or some such title, and every month they had a luncheon, and I went to one of them at the Chevy Chase Club, a month after my husband died. I was still spending much time answering letters that had come from all over the world, and on business affairs, but Elfie Elbrick, who had been evacuated from Warsaw with me in 1939, urged me to go. So I did. Harold B. Hoskins, Director of the Foreign Service Institute, was to speak on his idea of creating a course for wives.

Bill and I had known Harold when he was in Iraq and we were in Iran. Oftentimes he had to come to Tehran on official business. I had also met his wife. I thought his talk about having a course for wives was fascinating. How many times I had said, "It would have been so wonderful if I could have taken a course like this when I was new to the Service. Life would have been so much easier. I'd have known where I stood." So many of the senior wives didn't tell you, you see. I guess they felt that would seem too much like "ordering."

Since I had some teaching background before marriage, and had lived all over the world except in the Far East, I went up after his speech to tell Harold how wonderful I thought such a course would be. "When you get started," I said, "if there's any way I can help, I'll be glad to." You see, Bill had just died and I was happy to get into something to help. He said, "Send me your curriculum vitae at FSI." He added that they would not be starting the project very soon but he would let me know when they did.

I sent him the vitae. My parents lived in Mount Vernon, NY, and while I was visiting them the following summer Harold had written to me, "When you're back in Washington, please come see me and we'll talk about the wives course." It was now September and I went to see him. He told me of his plans and so on. Before I knew it, I was doing the course!

The idea was for me to do the guidance especially for the wives, including protocol and social usage. Another part of the course, titled M-112, would cover material helpful to them which their husbands were getting. We set to work. I think the first course was inaugurated in January 1956. My husband had been a career officer, a Consul General, who had died young. But I had lived in so many places in the world, including during World War II. That was a fascinating time to be in the Foreign Service, you were sort of one step ahead of events. I could draw on my experiences - how many escapes we had and all that sort of thing.

My talks for the wives involved one course per month; I was "on" two weeks, "off" two weeks. In light of questions the wives asked, I set up a panel of experienced wives. Some of them knew a great deal more than I. As a result, I could add to the training material the invaluable substance of questions and answers that arose in class, and I really "grew" with all that information. In that part of the course we had sometimes 45 wives. They often didn't bother to attend the lectures for their husbands but came especially for mine. The wives were mainly interested in and worrying about making a home, etc., which was something I emphasized in the advice I gave.

Q (Fenzi): Tell us some of your experiences, in Warsaw for instance, that qualified you so highly to teach spouses how to cope in the Foreign Service. If I recall correctly, you escaped from Warsaw to Oslo just ahead of the Nazis.

BLAKE: Well, I was married in November 1938. I was a young Foreign Service wife in Warsaw, trying to do my job and everything, and the older wives were very helpful I must say. In early '39 the wives there went to an air raid precautions course: we wore masks and heard lectures. I was married when I came off the ship Bill was waiting for me in Gdansk, which was then called Gdynia, I think. There were rumblings in early '39 but the summer was beautiful. Ambassador Anthony ("Tony") and Mrs. Biddle lived in a very lovely palace and entertained so much. There were gardens, even a platform outdoors where we danced. All kinds of celebrities came; I remember meeting Noel Coward. For a young Foreign Service wife it was all very thrilling.

It was because of the beautiful summer weather that German tanks on dirt roads were able to go wherever they wished. On muddy roads rutted by cart wheels they could not have invaded so quickly. That summer that was so exciting for a young Foreign Service wife came to an end. I wish, now, that I had paid attention and had asked my husband what was going on. Like most husbands he talked about a lot of things to his wife; of course we had to keep quiet about them.

Three days before the Germans attacked all the American husbands came home and told their wives we were to be evacuated to Oslo. We all said we didn't want to go. They, in turn, said, "Well, so-and-so is going" so naturally we decided to go too. We would have resisted going if we'd known that Mrs. Biddle was going to stay with her husband, who was still in Warsaw but who left later with the Polish Government for Romania. There were four of us wife Elfie Elbrick, Betty Bailey, who was also a new bride, and another new bride whose name escapes me, and I.

Our husbands saw us off on the train three days before the invasion. Our first stop was Riga, Latvia. We were there overnight, with our one small suitcase that was all we were allowed to take, staying with the Packers. We were to go by ship or ferry across the Baltic to Stockholm, our next stop en route to Oslo. Riga was a legation then. Our Minister was Wiley and his wife Irena, who was of Polish descent, had planned earlier a very large dinner party that evening. We four signed ourselves in the book "the not so merry wives of Warsaw." Somehow, even with our small suitcases, we were able to dress black tie. I had a sequined jacket that my husband called my "drum major dress" and it was proving useful.

Q (Fenzi): How wonderful! You were being evacuated but you took something like that along. Today you'd take Rebocks and blue jeans and sweat shirts.

BLAKE: Well, we did it, one black tie costume, but later on that was worthwhile in Oslo, where Daisy Harriman was the American Minister, and she entertained all the time. [Florence Jaffray Harriman, ambassador to Norway 1937-1940]

The next morning after arriving in Riga we left for Stockholm across the Baltic. We spent the night there and were then to go by train to Oslo. Discussing all this we four wives decided, "This is ridiculous, why can't we go back to Warsaw? Before we take the train we'll go early to the Legation and we'll say, 'We want to go back.'" As we were walking along the street we noticed big kiosks displaying news bulletins and crowds of people reading them. We asked some of the Swedes, "What is the news?" They said, "Warsaw has been bombed." The world collapsed under us. We knew this was the beginning of a long, terrible thing.

It struck me in another way too because my ancestors were from Poland. I felt, "Poor Poland." Anyway, we reached the Legation but now of course we knew there was no going back. We took the train to Oslo. Oslo has a beautiful tram ride up to the Holmenkollen tourist hotel halfway up the mountain. People would take the tram to the top of the mountain and ski all the way down. (I started to learn how to ski there and broke my ankle.) Our men were in Warsaw; war was raging. The men who'd remained in Warsaw told us later that they got lots of news about soccer but didn't know what was happening in the rest of the world. My husband and the other men were moved out of their apartments into the chancery; the Ambassador's residence was separate from the chancery. A large American flag was painted on the Embassy's roof and the building was safe. The Germans were very, very careful not to bomb that building. A U.S. journalist who wrote a book about the Warsaw bombing had pictures of our men living in the Embassy digging trenches in the garden. After the war when I visited Poland, the current Ambassador had a display in the chancery lobby of the pictures that had been taken then. "You'll be a big help to me," the Ambassador said. "Identify these men." I was able to; they included my husband.

So there we were, up in Holmenkollen with absolutely no news of the men, no idea whether or not they were alive. Finally, probably it was after 21 days or so, one day of peace was declared between the Germans and the Poles. By this time our men were taking care not only of American interests but those of the British and the French, because of course we were not yet at war. (Incidentally, I didn't like Herman Wouk's "The Winds of War" because the whole first part of the novel was inaccurate.) On the one day of peace my husband was driving our car in a long line of diplomats and U.S. citizens too who were supposed to be able to leave. People who could not leave were offering our men diamonds, gold, jewelry - anything just to get them a visa, which of course couldn't be done.

Out of a clear sky I got a phone call from Königsberg: my husband had gotten there by car and said he would soon be up in Oslo and we would wait there for another assignment. He finally arrived, so there were a number of us up there at Holmenkollen. The women used to go to the Legation and sew for the Norwegian Red Cross and had a very nice afternoon together. Our Minister Daisy Harriman was wonderful to us. We were invited whenever she had dinner parties, which kept our spirits up. The Legation was down in the city; we were up the mountain at Holmenkollen. It was about a half-hour's ride on the tram up that steep slope the Norwegians skied down.

Q (Fenzi): You've given us some valuable background. I want to take you from Oslo forward.

BLAKE: When we finally left, Armistead was the last to be assigned. Each week Mrs. Harriman had dispatches from Washington and would tell us who had an assignment and where. We waited and waitel was there for a total of six months. We were assigned to Basel, Switzerland, which is an exciting story too, how we got there.

We left Oslo exactly one month to the day before the Germans attacked Oslo. If our departure had been delayed - One of the Legation's officers had to go across on the Siberian railroad to get out of Oslo.

Q (Fenzi): You've really had a variety of assignment Rangoon, Tampico, Tehran, post war Warsaw, Rome, Dakar, and very briefly Manchester, England. With these diverse posts, you really did go from one end of the world to the other. Did that fact influence Harold Hoskins when he asked you to take over the spouse training course?

BLAKE: I really don't know.

Q (Fenzi): It was more the compassion of the Foreign Service wanting to help you because you were a widow? Mr. Hoskins needed someone to do the spouse training, you had lost your husband, you had all this wonderful experience, but at the same time I think he was interested in helping you?

BLAKE: I don't know... Maybe someone hadn't shown up that he felt had the qualifications that I had.

Q (Fenzi): I ask this because when Loy Henderson hired Romaine Alling...

BLAKE: That was before. And Mr. Hoskins didn't want me to even have any connection with what Mrs. Alling had done. He wanted to start anew.

I never learned anything about what she had done except I think that it was on a very high level, of Ambassadors. I think that's what her training was. But I can't say.

I think Harold Hoskins wanted this to be his project, and it was, you see? As I said, he was the forerunner of a course for wives, although as yet there were no funds or legislation for making such training available.

But he felt strongly about it. He really felt strongly about it, and he was going to set up a program which had never been done before. I think I had mentioned to him that maybe it would be a good idea for me to talk with Mrs. Alling about what she had done. And he said no. I knew that he didn't want me to. That's where I said he was a pioneer in the field. I didn't even know Mrs. Alling.

Q (Fenzi): Mrs. Alling was rather unstructured, and according to the Washington Post of the late 1940s or early 1950s,...

BLAKE: I wasn't here then, I didn't know about that.

Q (Fenzi):she had two courses. One was "The First Post" for these young people going out the first time, and the other was "Protocol." And she was employed by the State Department. That's why I ask, because you see Loy Henderson really saw to it that Mrs. Alling was employed, because she needed the money. She had two daughters. Henderson and Paul Alling were Mideast hands together. Anne Alling Long has said that really Loy Henderson hired her partly out of compassion because he wanted to do something for her because she was a widow, and partly because he felt she was the righshe was very Mrs. Foreign Service, apparently. Her daughters say they never saw her in anything but a dresno slacks, very proper with hats, calling cards, gloves and everything. That's another reason, I guess, why Loy Henderson thought she would be a good person for the job. She was before you.

BLAKE: Then there was Cornelia Bassell.

Q (Fenzi): She was even earlier. There wasn't much information on it because you see they weren't official. Mrs. Alling was official in that she did have a salary, \$3,000 a year.

BLAKE: I thought that I was doing very well, \$4 an hour. I was on a WAE, actually employed basis. I didn't want to be Civil Service. I just wanted to be paid for the time that I gave, which was usually four hours a day - \$32 a day for the work that I did [sic].

Q (Fenzi): One of my questions was, Why was there a need for a program? Well, Mr. Hoskins perceived the need for the program. Another question, What caused the need for the changed direction in spouse training, from Mrs. Alling's very high-level training for Ambassadors? And of course this little group of young Officers who went to Germany were a special case. I think it's very interesting that she perceived that there was a different need for this, which shows some of her innate interest in it.

BLAKE: I didn't even know Mrs. Alling.

Q (Fenzi): She was killed in an automobile accident, unfortunately. Did Mr. Hoskins's interest possibly arise because the Foreign Service was becoming more democratized at this point and was bringing in a broader scope of people from a wider social spectrum? Why was there this need in the 1950s?

BLAKE: I think the need was always there, but there was never any thought of using taxpayers' money to train wives. It was just the Officers who were getting orientation - wives had to learn the hard way, you see. So Hoskins really and truly was the pioneer: he wanted to have a real course for wives.

Q (Fenzi): Could the fact that the Wristonee wives, who came in the early 50s ...

BLAKE: That made my work quite a bit harder, too. If somebody, say, a businessman, was going out at a high level and the wife knew nothing about foreign service - sometimes the men didn't either - I would get a wife who had served in that country, an Ambassadors, and get the two wives together.

Q (Fenzi): So you did bring together the experienced Foreign Service wife with the new Wristonee wife, whose husband had after all been civil servants.

BLAKE: The Wriston wives took my course, and then one of the sessions in my biweekly course was a panel session. That was a very popular one. Of course the panel wives always dressed properly, wore hats. The Wristonee wives would ask particular questions of panel members who were representing or had served in the same areas where the wives were going.

That was one of the things I developed - the course kept evolving all the time. I must say, I really had an attendance of about 45 wives. They got babysitters and came for those sessions, but they usually failed to come back for what they could have gotten from their husbands' sessions. I guess they felt [laughing] they could learn from their husbands at home.

Q (Fenzi): You say that the Wristonee wives caused a problem for you.

BLAKE: Well, I didn't mean to say "problem," exactly. It changed the course a bit. I had to adjust to the training that was needed. That's the point. And I myself was growing constantly. I had not been an Ambassador; my husband had died before he reached an age when that could have happened, if it ever would.

Q (Fenzi): Another question on my list: In setting up the course, what was your relation with AAFSW? Well, it didn't really exist then.

BLAKE: The organization then was called the Foreign Service Wives, and they just had a luncheon.

Q (Fenzi): They really weren't organized, in those days.

BLAKE: Not at all. I was in on some of the organization meetings held by June Byrne, at the time.

Q (Fenzi): What were the mechanics of setting up your program, and how were the courses selected and organized?

BLAKE: My part of the course amounted to about three days of the two weeks, but all along I had office hours when even young officers could come and ask my advice. I would set up appointments, and wives would come. It was a room in the basement of Arlington Towers, formerly a garage. My room had a window, at least, some rooms didn't, and I made it cheerful, less claustrophobic by putting all sorts of things up on the walls. [She pulls out a photo.] This is a picture of my office. You see a picture of Dakar that someone painted, and here are some of the women. Naomi Mathews was on my panel, another one was a student. I'm holding the first booklet on "Social Usage." Here's a blowfish someone gave me, from Dakar, Senegal. Bill was Consul General of all of French West Africa, which has since become about 12 different countries. I always urged the wives to bring personal things with them to create a home no matter where they lived.

Here's a picture of my chief, Mr. Andreas Ronhovde, who was director of foreign affairs. Here are some letters you might like to see...

Here's a letter from Mrs. Lispenard Crocker Green, who says: "Dear Mrs. Blake: I have just returned from visiting 13 Far Eastern countries and I thought you might be interested to know that I heard so many enthusiastic comments about the course you give to Foreign Service wives." This was helpful to me, you see, because the rewards for me were intangible. I really didn't know how I was doing until after I had finished the course. I was on my own, but still on the staff of the Foreign Service, and thought this would be good time to visit a number of foreign countries - which I did, on my own finances. In Rome, our Ambassador was G. Frederick Reinhardt, and I attended a big reception with the wife of a Congressman; we were friends, lived in the same building. We were invited to luncheons, and I seemed to know all the Ambassadors. (She has often said to me, "That was my first trip and the best trip I've ever taken.")

One of the ladies at the reception at the Residence there, an Army attaché's wife, came up to me and said, "Oh, Mrs. Blake, you don't know how much your course has helped me." Without little things like that I never would have known there was no evaluation of my work. The fact that so many wives came and at considerable sacrifice of their time in order to attend classes, was rewarding.

The Green letter goes on: "I have taken the course myself with much pleasure and interest." She didn't need to take it but she did anyhow, perhaps to evaluate it. "I was curious to know what the wives of our Ambassadors in the field thought of it. All those to whom I spoke felt that the course was performing a very necessary service in helping to prepare wives going abroad for the first time, and they only wished that all wives had the opportunity of attending your course. Mrs. Douglas MacArthur and Mrs. Walter Dowling in particular expressed their appreciation of the fine work you are doing.

"I suppose there are few if any careers where wives are so closely associated with the success or failure of their husband's task as in the Foreign Service. There is a clear need to provide our Foreign Service wives with at least some of the same kind of training and briefings that are given to their husbands at the Institute. I have never questioned this need but I find it gratifying to discover from my travels that your services in fulfilling this need are so widely appreciated by those in the field who are in the best position to judge. Perhaps it would be helpful if you could take a trip to the field to discover at first hand how best to meet the needs of the Foreign Service in this important branch of its training services. I am sure the experience would be rewarding. With warmest regards...."

I knew her parents because they were in post-war Warsaw when we were. I took her advice, and when the course was over I made the visits on my own expense, wrote a report afterwards and gave it to George [Morgan, who replaced Harold Hoskins as Director of The Foreign Service Institute].

Q (Fenzi): I have a question: When you said you perceived there was a need for changes in the type of training after the Wriston wives came in, what kind of changes?

BLAKE: Well, perhaps I implied something wrongly - I didn't "change" the course, but in respect to the personal training, etc. I had to evoke a realization among those on the panel who were giving information that we had to adjust the course in relation to where the wives were going. I adjusted the course in that light. Therefore I even got special materials for them; and even if I could, before the panel members arrived, I would study up and specialize in particular details. When I phoned individuals to ask them to serve on my panel, I would say, "You realize that some of the wives were going out at a higher level; they haven't had the experience of coming from the bottom up. Therefore, we have to adjust our course to maybe giving them more advice re moving from the bottom up.

Q (Fenzi): So in effect you enlisted experienced wives to help make that adjustment. Very interesting.

BLAKE: So they [the Wristonee wives] could ask questions of panel members who could provide info about countries where I hadn't served.

Q (Smallwood): Who made up the panel?

BLAKE: I did. I knew so many people, you see. In addition to calling them, I asked their advice. Caroline Simmons, whose husband John Farr Simmons had been Chief of Protocol, was wonderful; and Elfie Elbrick, wife of former Ambassador to Brazil, C. Burke Elbrick; and Dorothy Kidder was on a few of my panels. I think I had about four.

Not all panel members were high ranking. If there were wives enrolled who were going out at a higher level, I definitely had members of higher rank, but I also had some more junior members. They were divided half and half, two in each category. The junior members could reassure the younger wives. The panel was something I felt was needed and it became a very fine device.

On the last day of the course, there was a large tea - one given by Mrs. Wilbur Carr, for instance. Her husband was head, I believe, of the Foreign Service Officers Training School before it became FSI, perhaps also head of training of Consuls, I'm not sure. The older women were delighted to be hostess to some of the young women from small towns, who didn't know what a formal tea was, which they would experience overseas - after, needless to add, being disabused by us of the striped-pants cookie-pusher idea. It was a lovely ending to the course. I'm not sure whether Marvin Patterson gave a tea or not. She came into this later. When the course was well under way, and after her husband had reacted to my booklet on "Social Usage," she wrote a piece for me called "Suggestions for wives from other Foreign Service wives." [She points to pages by Patterson.]

The course had been going for a while when the Pattersons returned to the U.S. I told Mr. Hoskins that I thought it would be very good to have somebody monitor the course and evaluate it. He thought that was a good idea too. I suggested that I thought Marvin Patterson would be an ideal person to do it, and her name as author of a report better than mine. Her comments given to me, in the form of above "Suggestions," resulted from her disappointment that whereas she had monitored the course - and that fact was included in her bio-data - the Department was ignoring that there was a course during that time!

The people at the Foreign Service Institute weren't aware of this background; there was nothing in their files. [Marvin Patterson recalls giving an end-of-session tea for Mrs. Blake. An article in the December 1983 AAFSW News cites a letter written by Mrs. Patterson to clarify the origins of spouse training. A previous issue of the News had erroneously reported that training had begun at FSI in 1962.] Since then I've done what I can to answer questions. Someday, I have thought, I'll get out all my material and perhaps ask the Foreign Service Institute if they want it. But I never got around to it.

Q (Fenzi): Well, [laughing] that's what we're doing right now.

BLAKE: I know! And I think that's wonderful. I'm delighted.

Q (Fenzi): I should tell you, we don't really have facilities at the Foreign Service Institute to put your files with your transcript where they would be safe. We put everything in the Lauinger Library in Georgetown because there you have to request the materials from Special Collections, sign papers, promise not to remove anything from the Library.

BLAKE: The papers I've stored aren't doing me any good, and if they can help other people, that will be just wonderful. Of course, I think the Foreign Service wives are quite different now than they used to be...

Q (Fenzi): They are.

BLAKE: ...so you see this is just historical material, in a way.

Q (Fenzi): I give an hour talk on the history. I'm not on the staff; I receive an honorarium. I've spoken twice before the Ambassadorial Seminar Wives luncheon, and recently I spoke to the DCM and Principal Officer wives. Also I spoke to a brand-new group which hadn't been out before. That was interesting because I didn't know before arriving at FSI that they were new, so as I was giving my talk I had to think in terms of someone who really had to have absolutely basic information. That was a mental challenge!

BLAKE: I should say. All the time that I was giving the wives' training course, the attach $\frac{1}{2}$ s wives, for instance, or the Army wives - I hope the texts of the speeches are there in the material - I was doing a lot of outside speaking. Not many Army or Navy people came, it was mainly the attach $\frac{1}{2}$ s who needed the training. When I was attending the funeral of Admiral Kearney, a woman whose husband had been Chief of Naval Operations, I think, approached me to ask if there were any way "her" wives could be helped. She invited me to lunch at her home, where the Vice President lives now, and I gave her a copy of the booklet. I gave advice and talked to a lot of outside people, you see.

Q (Fenzi): So the Defense Attach $\frac{1}{2}$ s wives didn't come to your course as part of the course, as they do now?

BLAKE: Oh yes, they did, but there weren't all that many. There were mainly Foreign Service wives. I have at home the clippings dealing with publicity - a great big notebook. Immediately, in November 1957, reporters all over the world wanted to interview me - Reuters, everybody. They invariably asked about the protocol and social usage part of the course, and I tried always to stress the other part that the wives were getting.

Q (Fenzi): Which was - the courses where they sat in with their husbands?

BLAKE: With their husbands - many of them did do that. But in the main they could only get to part - they were busy, young wives with children, etc. I had even begun to organize a babysitting facility, a room where they could bring their children, with somebody in charge while they attended classes, but there was no money for it. Among the material here there should be something about my effort in that. It never came to fruition. [They continue to sort papers.]

I gave Mr. Hoskins a report, and another one to his successor

Q (Fenzi): Why don't we go through some more of these envelopes? [They shuffle papers.]

BLAKE: Would you like to look sometime at my file book on publicity that I mentioned?

Q (Fenzi): Of course, yes.

BLAKE: Well, I will have to take some time to look over all of this. I have no idea what's in this [material]. [They continue sorting the envelopes.] I gave a report to Mr. Hoskins, and later to his successor.

Q (Fenzi): This is interesting - your job description of the first director. [She makes a note of it.]

Q (Smallwood): Do you remember if anybody said anything at all to you about any training for spouses, for wives, before you began to develop your program?

BLAKE: No. The first I heard of it was at that luncheon, with Harold Hoskins, a month or two after my husband's death. We had never had a Washington assignment. He had been in the Protocol department, before we'd even met. He knew Jeff Patterson because both were in Protocol in the old State Department building. I was wholly occupied in caring for my very ill husband after he was flown home from England. So it wasn't until that luncheon where Hoskins spoke - and it was fortunate that I went to that luncheon. You see, that started the whole thing.

Q (Fenzi): Were you aware that Mrs. Alling had been doing something?

BLAKE: Nothing, noting about any of that. I didn't know what had been going on. I was busy overseas, you see.

Q (Smallwood): Because that's why I started off with you as being the beginning. I want to be accurate, that people had been trying to get something but you were the first to put a legitimate - the course together.

BLAKE: I was doing what Harold Hoskins asked me to. Of course I was a little worried at the beginning, thinking to myself, "I haven't had any training in giving courses. I've taught school, having a math major at college and a physical science minor - [laughs] but I didn't teach that. When I graduated, there weren't positions for women to teach that, though you could go into the business world, which I would have liked to do.

Anyway, I thought to myself, "Can I really do this?" We consulted with heads of the different departments. The arrangement of the men's course simply appeared on my sheet but I had nothing to do with that. It had been set up for the men. It was called part of M-112, but was specified as that it was part of the men's course.

Q (Fenzi): So you arranged your courses around the men's courses, is that it?

BLAKE: Actually, we selected the courses. The men also had to decide which would be open to wives - many of them were not. So those the wives could go to, that would be worthwhile for them, were put on my sheet. I knew where free time was, and I think I usually had two full days of wives' business, when they were with me - all day Thursday and Friday as I recall.

Q (Fenzi): What were the titles of some of your courses?

BLAKE: We'll have to look that up. They were on yellow sheets: M-112 was the title of the course.

Q (Smallwood): I think I've seen some material about that in the FSI files. Something else I'm concerned about is the continuity. When you left, and all your things were packaged and someone started anew, and they almost forgot - I'm concerned about the continuity.

BLAKE: I think it's because my files were removed. I don't know who did it. Maybe a janitor just put all the things together.

Q (Fenzi): That's one of the flaws, if you will, of the mobile life that one has in the Foreign Service - that people are here for a couple of years, then they go off to Dakar. There is a lack of institutional memory. If this history that we're working on together helps to close that gap, that would be fantastic. There's no point in reinventing the wheel, which, I'm afraid, does get done from time to time.

BLAKE: It's too bad that this wasn't done sooner, too. It would have been so useful. I didn't even know what was here [in these papers], you see. I couldn't understand why George Morgan - I know I sent him, when I left, a complete report. He should have had that: he should have known what had gone on before.

Q (Smallwood): I ran across that, too - I didn't run across that you had sent a report.

BLAKE: Oh yes, I wrote a long report for him and it should have been in the files. You found the report?

Q (Smallwood): Yes. It's there, the letter that you wrote explaining why you were leaving because of the Congressional change and everything, and that "maybe this will be of assistance to someone else who takes over."

BLAKE: I don't know what happened. I really truly don't know what happened. I couldn't understand why they could say the course only started in 1962, when they had that report, at least.

Q (Fenzi): The only insight that I could give to that is that there is a letter to George Morgan from FSO Mary Vance Trent, saying, "I'm very interested in doing this but I do not want it to be a course in social etiquette for the wives. I want it to have more of..."

BLAKE: And it wasn't. My part was... not social etiquette but making a home. And helping your husband. "Two for the price of one."

Q (Fenzi): We could ask George Morgan, you know; he's still alive. I have his phone number. My only supposition is that he didn't want to put off Mary Vance Trent in some way by showing her what you had done, because there was some emphasis on social usage and protocol. Maybe it was a conscious decision. [Fenzi note: When reached by telephone in Florida the day following the interview, Ambassador Morgan had no recollection of the report and stated that his spouse, the late Peggy Morgan, had been instrumental in working with Mary Vance Trent in establishing the new courses at the Institute.]

BLAKE: He knows nothing about me, I wasn't a friend of theirs. I just dropped out of the picture and they went on, you see. If Harold Hoskins had continued, everything would have been just fine. But it was completely new. I came back from Europe - that trip on my own, in between - when Congress stopped the course. But I continued to give talks to some of the Officers on protocol and social usage, and if anybody wanted advice from me they could always call me.

Q (Smallwood): When Hoskins left, did it have any connection with Congress?

BLAKE: I really don't know. I didn't even know that he was going to leave - he was still there while I was there. I was doing all this on my own. There must be something in the final report as to how the course helped the wives, information I was trying to gather. And if it hadn't helped, or if they had suggestions, how to change it for when the course would start again. They hoped to start again when Congress gave approval. I think, for two years, the course was not "on."

Q (Fenzi): I would like to mention here that the directorship of the Foreign Service Institute is usually a two or three year assignment, so I would assume Hoskins's departure was because his time was up. He may have asked to leave, however.

BLAKE: I think he did. But the point is that I didn't realize this, and I was overseas and getting all this information, meeting with wives of the chiefs of mission and so on, doing some sightseeing at my own expense. When I came back, I was readying the material for my report. I still did not know that Hoskins had retired. I was invited to a big FSI reception, which may have been a farewell for Hoskins, and saw an individual there whom I didn't know, and then was shocked to hear, "That's the new director of the Foreign Service Institute."

Q (Smallwood): I asked the question because in interviews I've noted there was a great deal of institutional resistance to developing any type of substantial course for spouses. Congressman Rooney intervened to stop the program as being of no use; then the final report came out to convince Congress otherwise. And this caused Congress to fund the program and bring it back. There really was the resistance I refer to?

BLAKE: And there was resistance to my doing this booklet on social usage. I insisted on it, and went ahead - not surreptitiously, but I did it, because I felt the great need for something simple. I didn't even use the word "protocol" although there's a lot about that in it.

Q (Fenzi): Didn't the Ambassadors largely support it, the ones that you sent copies to?

BLAKE: Yes, they did. And they responded to my plea to give suggestions.

Q (Smallwood): It just seems that the Ambassadors and Foreign Service people and wives supported it because they saw the need for it, but some people in Washington did not see the necessity for it.

BLAKE: They were worried about the striped pants/cookie pusher image so common in the press and tried so hard to avoid that. I heeded that while I was gathering the information for the booklet.

Q (Smallwood): When you submitted the final report for the new director, and asked if they needed further assistance, what were your feelings at that point?

BLAKE: I can't recall exactly now. But I think I was ready to have a rest. I hadn't mourned my husband's death, I just plunged into this - I ate it, slept it, it was part of me. I was giving and giving and giving of myself to do it. Also, it had been stated that when the next course started, a woman Foreign Service Officer should be in charge, and I didn't want to take the FS exam and become a Foreign Service Officer; I wanted now to do other things with my life. Of course, it had been wonderful to immerse myself in this work - that helped so much to occupy me after losing my husband. I was young when that happened.

Q (Smallwood): I've been wondering about the politics of the thing. I'll look into the reasons for Rooney's resistance.

BLAKE: Rooney said to Harold Hoskins, "Do you mean to say that you're using taxpayers' money to train wives in the Foreign Service?" That's what he said. That's how it was. You just didn't spend money on wives: they were supposed to help their husbands and that was it. Which we were, we were two for the price of one.

Q (Smallwood): Did you ever get a chance to see what direction the Congressional establishment were going in, who was being taken over .

BLAKE: I did some work with World Peace Through Law. They were convening in Washington and asked me to help with the protocol and hospitality housing of chief justices who came from all over the world. It was something new for me to do, among other interests I wanted to follow now and hadn't had time to do. If they had asked me to come back and Hoskins were still there, I would have. But with the arrival of a new person, Mr. Morgan, who didn't know me but they didn't ask me to come back. And Miss Vance, a Foreign Service Officer, now had taken over. And as I say, I wasn't interested in becoming an Officer and starting a career in the Service all over again.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Monroe Williams Blake (Deceased)

Spouse Entered Service:1933Left Service:1954You Entered Service:11/38Left Service:1954

Status: Widow of FSO; Former Director of Spouse Training at FSI

Spouse's Position: Consul General; Political Officer; chargé d'affaires

Place/Date of birth: New York City

Maiden Name: Olszewski

Date/Place of Marriage: November 4, 1938, Gdynia, Poland

Profession: Teacher before marriage

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:At Post: (volunteer) Post-War Warsaw 1946-47, worked with Caritas to help families in U.S. find whereabouts of relatives who were former residents of 90% ruined Warsaw; Oslo, Norway, Red Cross

In Washington DC: In 1960s worked with World Peace Through Law Conference, finding hospitality housing for Chief Justices and other legal representatives of countries from around the world; active in Welcome to Washington International Club; To 1955, organized and was director of the first training course for wives offered at FSI.

End of Interview